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ABSTRACT

This report presents the early findings from the analysis of a family literacy demonstration project under the direction of the National Center for Family Literacy. The data in this report are based upon the experiences of over 300 families who participated in the Toyota Families for Learning Program during the 1992-1993 school year. The first section of the report discusses the issue of, and approach to, family literacy. The second section covers the scope of the issue, focusing on impoverished children, parents who lack literacy skills, and low income families. The third section of the report profiles promising family literacy programs and outlines their necessary components. The final section details some of the encouraging results of the Toyota Families for Learning Program, including the following: (1) adults participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains in literacy than adults in adult focused programs; (2) participants in family literacy programs are more likely to remain in the program than participants in adult focused programs; (3) adults who participate in the program continue to learn; (4) children participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains than children in child focused programs; and (5) more educationally supportive home environments are reported among the participants in family literacy programs. (TJQ)

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The Power of Family Literacy

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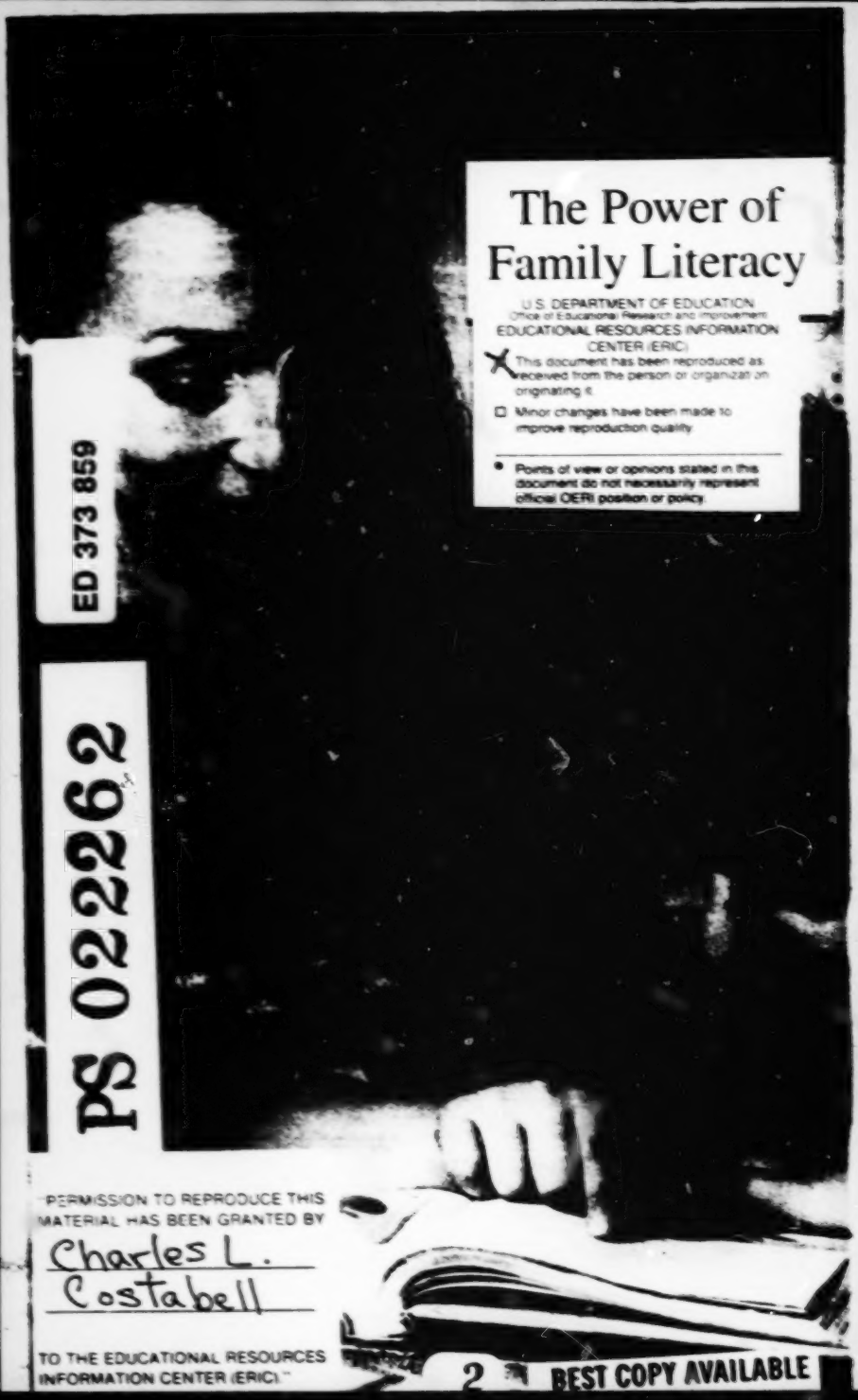

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The Power of Family Literacy

The issue

Undereducation and the poverty which results have created a trap that seems inescapable for millions of families across the United States. A parent without education lacks the skills to obtain a job and is left without an ability to support the family. What began as an educational problem becomes an economic problem for the whole family.

Children whose parents are undereducated are at grave risk of continuing the cycle. Fewer of these children are in pre-school programs, and more are early school failures and high school dropouts than are the children of more educated parents.

If literacy is to be increased and poverty reduced among the current generation of families, it is necessary to increase the educational skills of the parents.

If literacy is to be increased and poverty reduced among the next generation of families, it is necessary to increase the educational skills of the children beginning at an early age.

To increase education and reduce poverty for this generation and those that follow, it is necessary to approach illiteracy as a family issue.

The approach

Literacy is a family legacy handed down from generation to generation. To increase the level of literacy requires a family approach simultaneously addressing the literacy levels of parents and their children.

The National Center for Family Literacy has pioneered a program which combines early childhood education, parent literacy training, parent support, and interaction between parents and their children.

The possibilities

The following pages report the early findings from the analysis of a family literacy demonstration project under the direction of the National Center for Family Literacy. Preliminary results suggest that:

Adults participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains in literacy than adults in adult focused programs.

Participants in family literacy programs are less likely to dropout of the program than are participants in adult focused programs.

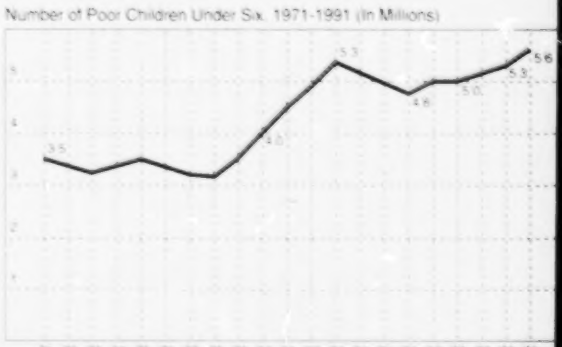
Children participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains than children in child focused programs.

More educationally supportive home environments are reported by parents in family literacy programs.

The Scope of the Issue

Impoverished children live with undereducated parents

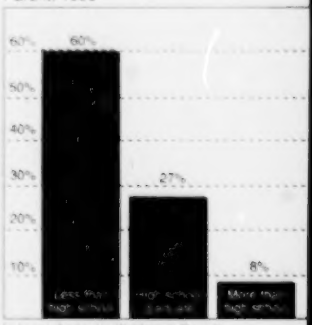
*Over the past twenty years, the number of preschool children who are living below the poverty line has increased 60% from 3.5 million in 1971 to 5.6 million in 1991. In 1991, almost a quarter (24%) of the children under six lived in homes beneath the poverty line.**


Number of Poor Children Under Six, 1971-1991 (In Millions)
3.5
4.0
5.3
4.6
5.0
5.3
5.6
71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91
National Center for Children in Poverty
Five Million Children, 1993 Update

The relationship between education and poverty is clear. Children whose parents lack a high school diploma are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than are children whose parents are high school graduates. They live in poverty seven and a half times more often than children whose parents have more than a high school education.

Parents without an education lack the essential skills to obtain a job. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, less than a quarter of the children living below the poverty line have a parent who is employed full-time. These parents are unable to compete for jobs which require the demonstration of literacy and technical competence. Those mothers without high school graduation who are fortunate enough to obtain a job earn, on average, forty percent less than those with a high school diploma.

Poverty Rates for Children Under Six By Educational Level of the Better-educated Parent, 1990



National Center for Children in Poverty
Five Million Children, 1992 Update

The conclusion is clear. Children are in poverty because their parents lack education.

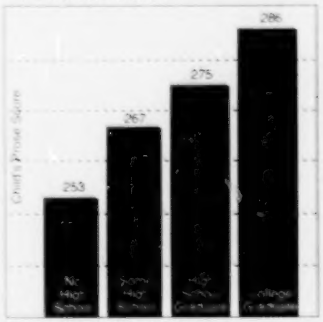
** In 1991 the poverty line was $10,860 for a family of three and $13,924 for a family of four.*

Children who live with parents who lack literacy skills do not have the same educational chances as other children

The less education parents have, the lower the level of literacy among children, even as adults.

The literacy of adults tested in the National Adult Literacy Survey varied depending upon the education of their parents. The higher the education of the parent, the higher the literacy of the individual.

Effect of Parent's Education on Literacy in the Next Generation

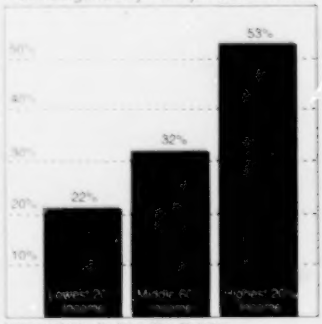


National Center for Education Statistics
Adult Literacy in America

Not only do these children lack the advantages of a home with an educated parent, they are also less likely to be exposed to educational opportunities outside the home. Three and four year olds from low income families are less than half as likely as children from high income families to participate in prekindergarten programs and only two-thirds as likely to participate as children in middle income families.

Prekindergarten programs seek to develop the school readiness skills of the young child in order to enhance the ability of the child to learn during the early years of education. Children from low income families are already at a disadvantage because they often have parents with little education. Their lack of participation in prekindergarten programs only increases that disadvantage.

Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds Enrolled in Prekindergarten By Family Income: 1991

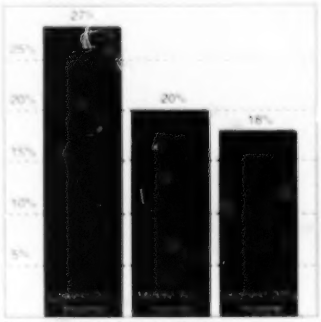


National Center for Education Statistics
The Condition of Education 1993

Children from low income families do less well in school even at the earliest grades

Children from low income families are fifty percent more likely than children from high income families and 35% more likely than children from middle income families to be seven years old or older and still in the first grade. This is often a result of having been retained in kindergarten or the first grade.

Percentage of First Grade Students Who Are 7-Years-Old or Older By Family Income: 1991



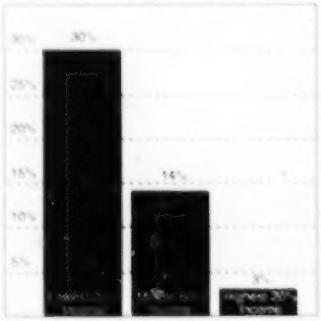
National Center for Education Statistics
The Condition of Education: 1993

The high illiteracy among low income parents leaves them without the skills to help their child in school. They may fear school systems and worry about the distance that will grow between them and their children if the children become educated.

Students who enter high school having been retained in earlier grades are more likely than other students to leave school before graduation. The underperformance of children from low income families at this early age makes it highly likely that they will be among the next generation of school drop-outs.

In 1991 the dropout rate among children of low income families was more than twice the rate of middle income families and ten times the rate of high income families.

Percentage of Students Who Leave School Before Graduation By Family Income

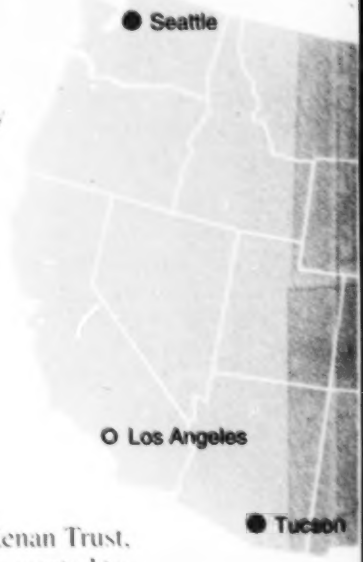


National Center for Education Statistics
The Condition of Education: 1993

The cycle of poverty is clear. Children are in poverty because their parents do not have enough education. In turn, the children of these parents also leave school before graduation without the skills to earn a living.

A Promising Program

Recognizing the importance of serving families and not individuals, Sharon Darling began the work of family literacy in 1985 while the Director of Adult Education for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Called the Parent and Child Education Program, or PACE, it was funded by the Kentucky legislature in 1986 and initiated in six rural counties. The following year, the legislature expanded the program to eighteen rural counties.



In 1988 the William R. Kenan Charitable Trust provided a major grant to establish model family literacy programs in Kentucky and North Carolina. For the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Project, the original PACE model was modified slightly:

(1) more time was found each day for parents and children to be together;

(2) parents were required to volunteer at the schools;

(3) teacher training was extended; and

(4) a career education component was included in the adult literacy classes.

In 1989, with an expanded grant from the Kenan Trust, the National Center for Family Literacy was created to promote family literacy programming and see it implemented effectively across the nation.

In 1991 the National Center for Family Literacy began the Toyota Families for Learning Program through a grant from the Toyota Motor Corporation. In the 1993-1994 school year, the program is operating in 15 cities at over 50 locations.

Conclusion

The problem of poverty is a family problem which links the educational skills of both parents and children. Families are in poverty because the parents do not have jobs, and the parents do not have jobs because they lack the education necessary to perform jobs.

If literacy is to be increased and poverty reduced among the current generation of families, it is necessary to increase the educational skills of the parents.

The children of families in poverty encounter major obstacles to education early in life. Their parents lack education and therefore are often unable or uncomfortable providing their children the assistance they need. Because they do not participate in early childhood education programs, they do not obtain the assistance that might be available outside of the home. Even in the first grade of school, a disproportionate number are in trouble.

If literacy is to be increased among the next generation of families, it is necessary to increase the educational skills of the children.

To increase literacy and reduce poverty, it is necessary to approach literacy as a family issue. Dealing with parents and children together expands skills and draws on the power of the family to affect its own future. By bringing the generations together, by dealing with the family as a whole, family literacy programs capture that power. The cycle of undereducation and poverty is broken.

O Programs implemented in 1993

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Components

The primary goal of the programs of the National Center for Family Literacy is to break the inter-generational cycle of undereducation and poverty by improving parents' basic skills and attitudes toward education, their parenting skills, their children's preliteracy and school readiness skills, and the overall quality of parent-child relationships.

Undereducated parents attend the family literacy program together with their three or four year old children. The children participate in a preschool program while the adults learn skills in the various academic areas. The programs include specific times when parents and children work and play together during the school day. Parents help their children learn in the preschool classroom, and they discover how to make learning occur at home.

The programs include four necessary components.

- *Early Childhood Education.*
  Using a cognitively-oriented, developmentally appropriate curriculum, children are encouraged to initiate learning experiences through activities they plan and carry out. The curriculum focuses on the broad set of intellectual skills which emerge during the preschool years. Those cognitive and psycho-motor skills are developed through a wide range of active explorations and investigations.

- *Parent Literacy Training.*
  Parents participate in adult education classes while their children are in preschool. Students' goals and needs are used to select materials and content, plan instructional sequencing, develop procedures, and conduct evaluation. The adult students spend approximately three hours each school day in academic study.

- *Parent Time.*
  Parents and teachers together design programs of interest to study and discuss. Topics typically include child nurturing, managing and coping with child behavior, community resources, communication between parent and child, spouse abuse, and job and educational opportunities. Parent time is designed to create an atmosphere among group members which produces identity with the group and peer support to help promote attendance and retention in the program.

- *Parent and Child Together (PACT).*
  During PACT time the parents and their children play together in the preschool classroom. The parents are encouraged to let the children lead in these play activities. They learn how to teach their children through play, and they practice what they are learning in Parent Time about communicating with their children. PACT enables parents and children to develop new interaction patterns and often more positive, supportive relationships.

Encouraging Results

During the 1992-1993 school year over 500 families at 32 locations in 10 cities participated in the Toyota Families for Learning Program conducted by the National Center for Family Literacy.

Information was collected from both parents and children when they entered the program, again at mid-year, and finally in late spring. In addition to demographic information, measures were obtained of the child's level of development and the parent's literacy. Records were kept of the family's attendance in the program.

Analysis of the data was conducted under the supervision of William W. Philliber, Senior Partner of Philliber Research Associates. Available data from adult-focused and child-focused programs were used to provide bases of comparison.

The families who participated in the Toyota Families for Learning Program were among the most in need of assistance. At the time they entered the program, 81% of the families received public assistance; 91% of the parents were unemployed; 84% had no high school diploma.

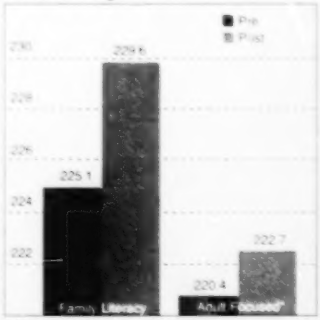
Most of the parents in the program were single (70%), African-American (64%) women (93%) between the ages of twenty-one and thirty (59%). Fourteen percent were younger and the rest were older.

The initial outcomes demonstrate encouraging gains in literacy among both parents and children.

Adults learn more in family literacy programs than in adult focused programs

Adults in the Toyota Families for Learning Program increased their reading scores as measured on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) reading test an average of 4.5 points. Participants in the State of California's adult focused programs increased their scores by only 2.3 points, or about half the gain demonstrated by participants in family literacy programs.

Gains in CASAS Reading Scores in Family Literacy and Adult Focused Education Programs



*California Department of Education. CASAS Statewide Accountability System for Federally Funded 321 Adult Basic Education Programs (1991)

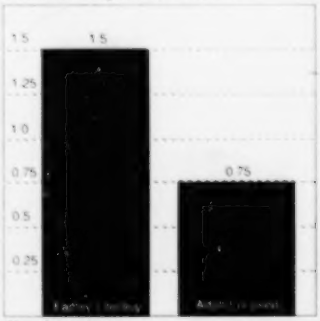
The CASAS test was used to measure the gains of adults in the Toyota Families for Learning Program who began the program with the lowest level of achievement. These adults who had the weakest literacy at the beginning of the program gained an average of 4.5 points while in the program. This gain is significantly greater than would be expected on the basis of chance alone ($p<.01$). It is estimated that a gain of about 4 points is equivalent to one grade level.

CASAS was also used to measure the gains of adults who participated in ABE/321 funded programs in California during the 1990-1991 year. Participants in these programs were more likely to be older (43% over thirty), male (52%), and Hispanic (60%) than were participants in the Toyota Families for Learning Program. How these differences are related to differences in learning are unknown. However, participants in the family literacy programs gained almost twice as much as participants in the California adult-focused programs, an achievement significantly greater than expected by chance alone ($p<.05$).

The reading skills of adults in the Toyota Families for Learning Program, as measured with the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), increased by a grade and a half, while those taking part in an adult focused program increased by only half that much.

The TABE was used to measure the gains of adults in the Toyota Families for Learning Program who began the year with an initial CASAS score of 225 or higher. They began the year reading at the level of a person with 7.6 years of education and ended reading at the level of someone who had completed 9.1 years of school. This gain is greater than would be expected by chance alone ($p<.001$).

Gains in TABE Reading Scores in Family Literacy and Adult Focused Education Programs (in Grades)



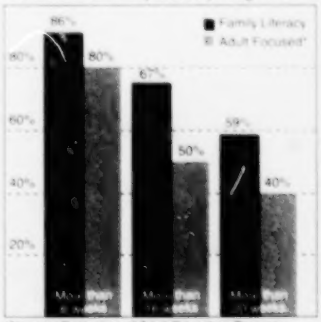
*Metis Associates
The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative: Analysis of New York City's 1989-1990 Adult Literacy Data Base (1991)*

The TABE was also used to measure the gains of adults in New York City's Adult Literacy Initiative in 1989- 1990. The Adult Literacy Initiative was composed of a consortium of agencies which oversaw the operation of various instructional programs designed to improve basic skills among adults and older youth. In 1989-1990 the Adult Literacy Initiative served a clientele which was predominantly female (61%) and Hispanic (50%) with an average age of 36. Many were employed (48%) and few were receiving public assistance (21%). These participants gained an average of 9 months in reading skills, half of what was gained by participants in the family literacy programs. The larger gain among participants in the family literacy programs is significantly higher than would be expected by chance ($p<.001$).

Family literacy programs reduce dropouts

The national evaluation of adult education programs found that over half of the participants dropped out within the first sixteen weeks and only 40% remained after twenty weeks, compared to two-thirds of those in Toyota's Family for Learning Program who remained after sixteen weeks and 59% who remained after twenty weeks.

Weeks of Instruction Received in Adult Focused and Family Literacy Programs



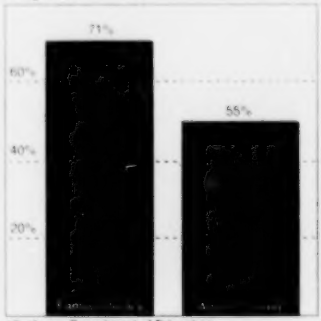
*National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs, Bulletin No4 (1993)

The Toyota Families for Learning Program served a population which was higher risk than the average participant in adult focused programs. They were more likely to be unemployed and receiving public assistance. At the same time, the family literacy approach was able to keep them in the program.

*Only 55% of people in California's Adult Basic Education programs continued until the end of the year, compared to 71% of those in Toyota's Families for Learning Program.**

More than a third of the parents who enrolled in the Toyota Families for Learning Program had previously enrolled in other adult education programs, but they dropped out. Seventy-one percent of all enrollees remained in the family literacy programs, significantly more than retained in California's adult education programs ($p<.001$).

Retention Rates in Family Literacy and California's Adult Focused Education Programs

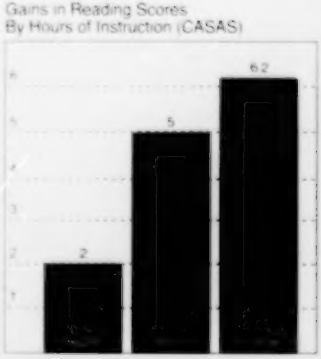


*California Department of Education, CASAS Statewide Accountability System for Federally Funded 321 Adult Basic Education Programs (1991)

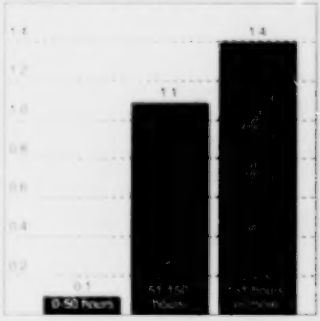
*Because the Toyota Families for Learning Program practices open enrollment, some participants who were in the program at the end of the year had received less than twenty weeks of instruction.

Participants who stay longer continue to learn

Participants who left the program within the first 50 hours of instruction gained very little, but those who stayed more than 150 hours increased their reading skills an average equal to about a year and a half of education.



There is a major difference in the gains in reading skills between persons who left the program within the first 50 hours and those who stayed longer. For those who entered the program with the least literacy and were tested using the CASAS, those who left within the first 50 hours gained an average of only 2 points. Those who received between 51 and 150 hours of instruction gained 5 points on average, a difference of 250%. Those who stayed for more than 150 hours averaged 6.2 additional points. These differences are significantly greater than chance ($p<.001$).

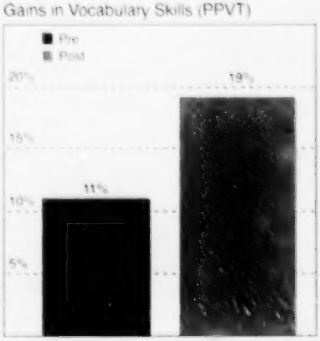


The pattern is even more dramatic among the more literate participants who were tested using the TABE. Those who left within the first 50 hours gained only 0.1 of a grade level while those who received between 51 and 150 hours gained an average of 1.1 grade levels or eleven times as much as those who left early. Those who stayed longer gained even more (an average of 1.4 grade levels). These differences too are significantly greater than chance ($p<.001$).

Children in family literacy programs learn more than children in child focused programs learn

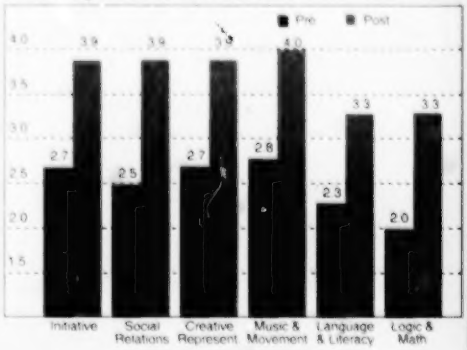
When the children began the Toyota Families for Learning Program, their average vocabulary skills placed them in the bottom 11% of the nation. At the end of the year their skills had improved to a point that the average child was at the 19th percentile.

Children are administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) when they begin the year and again at the end. The PPVT is based upon receptive vocabulary and provides an estimate of verbal ability and scholastic aptitude. The test was normed on a sample of 4,200 children. As a result it is possible to compare individuals beginning at 2.5 years with other individuals their age in the nation.



At the beginning of the year the average child in the Toyota Families for Learning Program was in the 11th percentile of the nation's children. Fifty-eight percent scored in the bottom five percentile. At the end of the year, the ability of the children had increased to the point that the average child had moved up eight points compared to other children in the nation. They ended the year averaging at the 19th percentile. Thirty percent of the children were performing above the 25th percentile. The gains made by the children were significantly greater than expected by chance ($p<.001$).

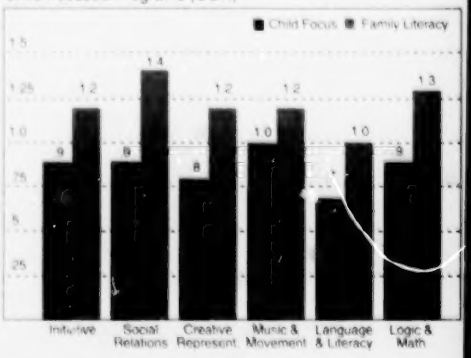
Gains in Developmental Skills (COR) Among Toyota Families for Learning Children (Scale Score)



Children in the Toyota Families for Learning Program made significant (p<.001) developmental gains during the year they participated in the program.

The Child Observation Record (COR) was developed by the High Scope Foundation to assess the development of young children ages 2.5 to 6. The 30 items which make up the test measure 6 different domains of development. Possible scores on each dimension range from a low of 1.0 to a high of 5.0. On every dimension the children began around the center of the range and moved toward the top.

Comparisons of Gains in Family Literacy and Child Focused Programs (COR)



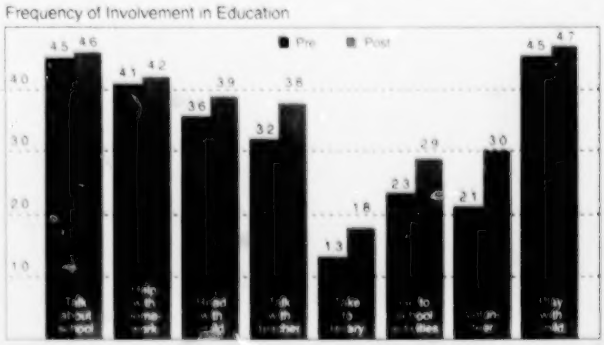
Children in the Toyota Families for Learning Program made greater developmental gains than children in child focused programs. On each dimension, the children in the family literacy program began with average scores equal to or below those children in child focused programs, but ended the year with higher scores.

The Child Observation Record was validated observing 2,500 children from child focused programs who were similar to the children in the Toyota Families for Learning Program. They were from low income, predominantly minority families. In addition the curriculum was similar and the teachers received similar training in the administration of the instrument.

On each dimension, the gains made by children in the Toyota Families for Learning Program were significantly greater (p<.001) than the gains made by children in the child focused programs.

Parents express greater support for their children's education

On each of eight different dimensions of support for child's education, parents report an increase in the frequency they are directly involved. Except for the frequency they talked to their children about school and help with homework (which were already high at the beginning of the year), the increases reported were significant ($p<.01$).



Family literacy programs seek to do more than provide educational programs for adults and children at the same time. They seek to assist the parents in learning to support the intellectual, social, and physical growth of their children. By altering the family environment, they hope to empower the family to function independently for the well being of their children. For that reason, the Toyota Families for Learning Program includes support groups through Parent Time and family interaction through Parent And Child Together (PACT) time.

Parents were asked how often they engaged in eight different activities which are felt to be supportive of their children's education. Responses were scored from a range of 0 (for never) to 5 (for every day). At the end of the year parents reported doing each activity more frequently than they reported doing at the beginning. These findings suggest that the Toyota Families for Learning Program may be having a positive influence on family environment.

Conclusion

The data in this report are based upon the experiences of over 300 families who participated in the Toyota Families for Learning Program during the 1992-1993 school year. While the results are encouraging, they must be thought of as preliminary. In particular, assessing the long term impact of the program will require the passage of time. However, the results point in five promising directions.

- Adults participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains in literacy than adults in adult focused programs.
- Participants in family literacy programs are more likely to remain in the program than participants in adult focused programs.
- Adults who participate in the program longer continue to learn.
- Children participating in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains than children in child focused programs.
- More educationally supportive home environments are reported among the participants in family literacy programs.

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